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C O N F I D E N T I A L HELSINKI 001604

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/NB AND EUR/RUS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/29/2014

TAGS: PREL PGOV RS EN LG

SUBJECT: FINNISH AND RUSSIAN PRESIDENTS DISCUSS ESTONIA,
LATVIA

REF: TALLINN 1121

Classified By: POL Chief John Hall for reasons 1.4(B) and (D)

¶11. (C) On December 22 Jarmo Viinanen, advisor to Finnish President Halonen, gave us a read-out on the December 14 meeting between Halonen and Russian President Putin. Viinanen confirmed that, as reported to Embassy Tallinn (reftel), Halonen had asked when Putin would sign border treaties with Estonia and Latvia. Putin's response, according to Viinanen, was, "When (their leaders) come here on May 9." Putin added that this is his policy line -- there are others who do not feel this way.

¶12. (C) We asked whether the Finns interpreted Putin's response as flippant. No, said Viinanen, "It's a promise in a way," and Putin may well have intended to send a message through Halonen: if Estonia and Latvia are willing to take the difficult political step of joining in the May 9 ceremonies, Putin would be willing to respond in kind by signing the treaties. The Finns believe that Putin's reference to this being his own policy line means that he will have to overrule those in the GoR who favor a more hard-line position. "I would suspect that there are those in MFA and elsewhere who would be happy to increase the pressure, not reconcile," Viinanen said.

¶13. (C) Putin also noted that he had instructed FM Lavrov to discuss this with the Estonian and Latvian FMs in Brussels. The Finns do not know what came of those conversations. Viinanen did comment that even if Putin's offer is genuine, U.S. and EU pressure may be needed between now and May to make sure the Russian promise is kept.

¶14. (C) Regarding the use of the word "occupation," Viinanen's description of the Halonen-Putin conversation matches that given to Embassy Tallinn. It is not clear to the Finns, however, whether Putin did intend to admit that an occupation took place, or whether this was some sort of rhetorical flourish intended to deflect the issue. Putin may have wished to call into question the definition of "occupation," or the legitimacy of its application in this instance. In any case, said Viinanen, "He didn't say flat out that it wasn't occupation."

¶15. (U) Other aspects of the Halonen-Putin meeting are reported septel.

WEISBERG